

Two new species of birds for the Philippines and other notable records

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The records presented involve 14 species, including Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* and Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*, which have not previously been recorded in the Philippines. Several other species are documented for the first time on individual islands.

The publication of *The birds of the Philippines* (Dickinson *et al.* 1991) in the British Ornithologists' Union check-list series was an important landmark in Philippine ornithology, drawing together all past records into a definitive and up-to-date checklist. Using this as a baseline, new distributional records can easily be identified. During the course of two visits to the Philippines, in March 1990 and February/March 1991, a number of species was recorded at apparently new localities within the Philippines, although some of the 'new' distributional data not included in Dickinson *et al.* (1991) have recently been published elsewhere. The observations detailed in this paper seek to update the status of Philippine birds as defined by the new checklist.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea* **Luzon:** Five at Candaba Swamp on 5 March 1990; one at Pagbilao fishponds on 21 March 1990, two there on 23 March 1990 and 13 on 14 March 1991.

The Grey Heron is an uncommon, but regular winter visitor, with sight records for Luzon from 3 September to 18 February (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). The above records extend the latest date to 23 March. The Asian Waterfowl Census recorded a total of 59 in January 1990 (Perennou *et al.* 1990).

CHINESE EGRET *Egretta eulophotes* **Palawan:** A total of 164 was counted at a high tide roost on 20 March 1990 in mangroves at Puerto Aventura, near Puerto Princesa. A minimum of 149 was recorded at high tide at the same place on 8 March 1991, but the roosting birds were more dispersed in the mangroves than in 1990. At low tide the Chinese Egrets were widely dispersed all along the coast in the Puerto Princesa area. In 1991 the Chinese Egrets were scrutinised for the presence of colour rings. During July 1990 82 fledgling Chinese Egrets were ringed on Shin Islet, South Korea by the Asian Wetland Bureau and Kyung Hee University. The colony on Shin Islet may comprise as much as 50% of the current known world population (Long *et al.* 1988), although it is suspected that the bulk of the world's breeding population is in North Korea (C. Poole *in litt.*). Many of the Chinese Egrets on Palawan in 1991 were not seen well enough to ascertain whether they carried colour rings, but it was interesting to note that not a single ringed bird

was identified. This suggests that the Chinese Egrets wintering on Palawan come from one of the other breeding colonies, perhaps in North Korea.

The Chinese Egret is one of the rarest herons in the world, breeding at just a handful of colonies in eastern China and Korea. Its winter quarters are still poorly known, but it is believed that the main wintering grounds may be south and central Philippines and northern Borneo, with smaller numbers in Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and (formerly) Singapore (Lansdown 1990, C. Poole *in litt.*). duPont (1971) considered it to be a rare winter visitor to the Philippines and it was only in the early 1980s that Chinese Egrets began to be seen regularly there (Gast and King 1985). Although now reported from a number of islands in the Philippines, the largest numbers have been recorded on Palawan and Cebu (Olango Island), mainly in March and April. The previous maximum count on Palawan was 108 in March 1986 (D. Yong in Long *et al.* 1988) and the count of 164 in March 1990 is probably the highest number ever recorded there. It would be interesting to discover if these large numbers are present throughout the winter or whether they simply represent passage birds. It is possible that Chinese Egrets disperse more widely in winter and only gather in large concentrations on passage. Large flocks have also been seen on Taiwan in spring (C. Poole *in litt.*).

ASIAN DOWITCHER *Limnodromus semipalmatus* **Cebu:** About 20 at high tide on Olango Island, off Cebu, on 4 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) consider this species to be a rare passage migrant, known only from a few records from Luzon, Simunul, Cebu and Olango. In fact, the species has recently been recorded regularly in winter on Olango Island: a 1987 survey recorded 48 individuals on 4 November (Magsalay *et al.* 1989) and the Asian Waterfowl Census counted 19 in January 1990 (Perennou *et al.* 1990).

RED KNOT *Calidris canutus* **Cebu:** At least 2 on Olango Island on 4 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) list only a handful of records of this rare passage migrant and winter visitor, from Luzon (November-January), Mindoro (July) and Mactan (August). The species is now known to be a regular visitor to Olango Island, and a survey in 1987 recorded 72 birds on 4 November (Magsalay *et al.* 1989).

GREAT KNOT *Calidris tenuirostris* **Cebu:** About 100 at high tide on Olango Island on 4 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) list a number of islands, including Cebu, with records in almost every month between August and May. They suspect a substantial autumn passage or winter population in the Sulu Archipelago, but it is now known that a large number winter on Olango Island. Magsalay *et al.* (1989) recorded 500 in November 1987, and the Asian Waterfowl Census recorded 577 throughout the Philippines, but with the majority on Olango Island, in January 1990 (Perennou *et al.* 1990).

BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER *Limicola falcinellus* **Mindanao:** two on Times Beach, near Davao, on 14 March 1990.

An uncommon passage migrant and winter visitor, recorded between 13 September and 6 February on several of the main islands, but not on Mindanao (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). This is apparently the first record for Mindanao and the latest winter record.

PIED AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta* **Palawan:** One at Iwahig fishponds near Puerto Princesa on 8 March 1991. This unmistakable species was first noticed by I. M. Lewis on one of the muddy fishponds at Iwahig and the identification was immediately confirmed by all the observers present. The brownish tone to the black parts of the plumage indicate a first-year bird. The nearest regular wintering area for the species is in south-east China, but recently good numbers have been recorded in winter in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Perennou *et al.* 1990). It is, however, only a very rare visitor to Japan (Brazil 1991) and South-East Asia. There is only one old record from Viet Nam (Delacour and Jabouille 1931) and two recent records from Thailand (Gretton 1990). This is the first record of Pied Avocet for the Philippines, and it may well be the most southerly South-East Asian record of the species.

BLACK-TAILED GULL *Larus crassirostris* **Cebu:** One first-summer bird on Olango Island on 4 March 1991.

A bird subsequently identified as this species was seen at Davao on Mindanao in 1990 (J. de Roever verbally) but details have not been published. The bird on Olango Island was observed at close range for half an hour amongst a flock of roosting Common Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus*. Its plumage was close to first-summer, although some traces of first-winter plumage remained. We subsequently discovered that this individual had been present on Olango Island for several days, having been found by Thorkild Michaelsen on 1 March.

The Black-tailed Gull breeds in coastal areas of eastern Siberia, Korea, Japan and China, dispersing north and south in winter. Small numbers regularly reach Hong Kong in winter (Chalmers 1986) and it is an uncommon winter visitor to Taiwan, more frequent in the north (Chang 1980). Although this species is only a short-distance migrant, vagrants have reached Thailand (Boonsong and Round 1991), and even Australia (Blakers *et al.* 1984) with the Philippines being only a few hundred kilometres south of Taiwan, the occasional appearance of the species in the archipelago is to be expected.

COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ridibundus* **Cebu:** About 100 on Olango Island on 4 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) only record this species from Luzon, Mindanao, Palawan and Mindoro. This is apparently the first record for Olango, although it is likely to have been overlooked in the past.

ROSEATE TERN *Sterna dougallii* **Cebu:** At least one bird amongst a large flock of Common Terns *S. hirundo* on Olango Island on 4 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) list only the islands of Culion, Corregidor and Palawan for this species, and consider it to be a rare breeder on remote islets. The above record appears to be the first for Olango Island.

COMMON TERN *Sterna hirundo* **Cebu:** At least 1,000 on Olango Island on 4 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) consider this species to be an uncommon passage migrant which may occasionally overwinter and oversummer, listing most of the major islands in the archipelago, but not Cebu. In fact the species is known from Olango Island and a survey in 1987 recorded 482 birds there (Magsalay *et al.* 1989). It seems probable that Olango is a regular site for the species.

AZURE-BREASTED PITTA *Pitta steerii* **Mindanao:** One male seen calling persistently, about 5 m above the ground in a small tree beside Road 5 in the logging concession of PICOP, near Bislig, on 3 March 1991. Another bird responded briefly nearby. Both birds were calling in mid-morning and their calls were taped. Playback was not attempted to avoid risk of disturbance to the birds. The second bird had also been calling in the same area on the previous evening.

P. s. coelestis, from Bohol, Samar and Leyte, has been reported regularly from Rajah Sikatuna National Park on Bohol in recent years, but the sole modern record of the nominate race, known only from Mindanao, was a single bird, in limestone country, on the Zamboanga peninsula (R. Krupa *per* J. Hornskov).

RED-WHISKERED BULBUL *Pycnonotus jocosus* **Luzon:** two seen in the American Cemetery, Manila on 18 March 1990.

Not included in Dickinson *et al.* (1991). The above record of this widespread resident of mainland southern Asia undoubtedly relates to escaped birds. However, the sighting is documented in case a feral population becomes established, as has happened already in many areas, including Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, Australia, U.S.A. and Hawaii (Long 1981).

STRIATED GRASSBIRD *Megalurus palustris* **Palawan:** One at Iwahig fishponds near Puerto Princesa on 8 March 1991.

Dickinson *et al.* (1991) record this species from most of the major islands in the Philippines, but not from Palawan. This sighting thus represents the first record for Palawan. Although a single individual may simply represent a vagrant, it is perhaps equally likely that this sedentary species is a recent colonist on Palawan. It seems improbable that it has been previously overlooked on Palawan as it is a large, frequently conspicuous bird with loud and characteristic calls. The species has a curiously fragmented distribution, presumably governed by the availability of suitable grassland habitat. It

occurs from India and southern China through mainland South-East Asia, and on Java and the Philippines. The gap in its distribution (Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and, formerly, Borneo) is probably related to the fact that these areas were, until recently, largely forested. Interestingly, two populations of Striated Grassbirds were discovered on Borneo in 1982 and 1983, in eastern and western Sabah respectively (Francis 1985). Francis considered that both populations were closest to *M. p. forbesi*, which is the form occurring throughout the Philippines, suggesting that immigration was most likely from Mindanao, the nearest breeding population known at the time. However, the birds in western Sabah could just as easily have come from Palawan if, in fact, the island has been colonised; this would require that colonisation took place before 1983. The origin of the Striated Grassbird at Iwahig is far from certain, but it seems more probable that it came from an island in the Philippine archipelago than from Borneo. Whatever its origin, further investigation of the area may well prove that the species is established there.

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